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SENSITIVE

FROM USMISSION UNESCO PARIS

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SUBJECT: USUNESCO GUIDANCE REQUEST: EXHIBITS

REF: Paris 7472

1. (SBU) SUMMARY AND GUIDANCE REQUEST: Mission continues to receive requests from American artists, consortia and NGOs for support in securing UNESCO exhibit space. This is because navigating the exhibits bureaucracy at UNESCO is deeply confusing to the uninitiated, rates to rent out the space are lower for member states than for individuals, and other member states regularly support exhibits in UNESCO's prestigious venues. Mission is aware of the dangers of appearing to play favorites in advocating exhibits, but believes that devising a mechanism to sponsor 1 or 2 exhibits per year could be a useful part of the Mission's public diplomacy. At the same time it would be a constructive way to engage UNESCO and counter the all too powerful myth that the U.S. does not value cultural exchange. GUIDANCE REQUEST: Mission asks that Washington consider devising a USG mechanism - perhaps involving the National Commission - for vetting requests and establishing a protocol of how the Mission can support selected exhibits. Mission would also appreciate draft language for a response letter to interested parties. END SUMMARY AND GUIDANCE REQUEST.

VETTING CURRENT PROPOSALS

2. (SBU) Mission is currently in contact with 4 different groups requesting USG support in accessing UNESCO exhibition space: The Tile Project (www.transculturalexchange.org) which hopes to exhibit tiles made by artists and children from around the globe, a private French citizen who has photographs of the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Art Child (www.artchild.org) which proposes an exhibit of frescoes painted by children around the world, and the Art Miles Mural project (www.the-art-miles-mural-project.org), which would exhibit 12 murals painted by children. U.S. citizens run 3 of the 4, and the French citizen is seeking to honor the legacy of a U.S. citizen.

3. (SBU) Mission understands, that for legal reasons, it cannot advocate a project over others. At the same time, we note that showcasing at UNESCO the work of dedicated and talented Americans demonstrates our country's commitment to cultural exchange. Mission suggests a National Commission panel that would review the merits of proposed projects on a quarterly basis.

PROTOCOL NEEDED

4. (SBU) All initial requests that we receive have a financial dimension, at the minimum involving the transport of exhibits to UNESCO. Mission is quick to alert requestors that we are unable to provide funding. However, many of the additional requests include moral or logistical support for the exhibit from the Mission. This could include: drafting a letter of support, navigating the process of getting UNESCO exhibit space, providing POCs at UNESCO, assisting with setup of the exhibit, helping to arrange a reception for the opening night of the exhibit, arranging roundtable discussions about the exhibit, and so forth. Some of these requests involve a mere phone call, letter or email, while others have significant resource implications (e.g. paying FSNs and/or Officers to help set up an exhibit, arrange invitations to a related roundtable or reception.)

UNESCO's PROCESS

5. (SBU) UNESCO has 4 exhibition spaces Fontenoy (Hall Segur), Miollis (Entrance), Fontenoy (7th floor) and Fontenoy (Area around Room X). It also offers a cinema. UNESCO offers exhibition space in these venues

to member states and affiliated NGOs at one rate, and to individuals at a higher rate - neither is cheap. There are no set guidelines for allocating space and the order of the waitlist is murky. There is some evidence of bias in the Bureau of Public Information, which addresses allocation of exhibit space. For example, a hastily organized exhibit on cultural diversity was shown during negotiations in May 2005 which was confusing since Mission was told in March that there was an 8 month waiting list and the May cultural diversity meeting had not been set that far in advance. Sources in the Office of the Director General have offered to help us navigate the process more quickly, but they ask that we have a clear proposal and dates in mind before they weigh in on our behalf.

MEMBER STATES ADVOCACY

16. (SBU) Some member states report that since the exhibition spaces are very expensive and the waiting list is very long, they receive few inquiries. In the case of Germany, which, like us, has had inquiries from groups willing to be on the waiting list and pay the high fees, it is typically the German National Commission that evaluates the quality of the exhibit and its relevance to UNESCO's mandate. If an exhibit is suitable, they then draft a letter of approval to UNESCO. The German delegation advised that the connection with UNESCO is essential, as otherwise you would have to field requests from artists seeking to obtain the cachet of the UNESCO exhibition to put on resumes and so forth, even if their work is unrelated to UNESCO.

17. (U) COMMENT: Mission continues to seek opportunities to engage with UNESCO on concrete projects in order to shift the organization's focus away from creating more normative instruments. Using the UNESCO exhibit space for panel-vetted exhibits could be an important part of our public diplomacy program and would demonstrate how U.S. citizens value culture and encourage cultural exchange, and thus affirm mutual values of the U.S. and UNESCO. It could also provide a low-cost method of providing cultural programs to our UNESCO audience to the extent that NGOs and artists can cover major exhibit costs. In any case, Mission will need a mechanism for addressing the requests and language for a response letter to these inquiries. END COMMENT.
Koss